

**Atlanta Office**  
**Consolidated Plan Focus Group Forum**  
**February 15, 2002**

**Summary Report**

This report presents the result of a focus group meeting held to discuss streamlining and improving the consolidated planning process. The meeting was held in the Atlanta Office on February 15, 2002. Present at the meeting were representatives of fourteen Entitlement grantees all from the State of Georgia. The attendees were staff members of State or local governments that had been directly involved in the consolidated planning process. A list of the participants is included as an attachment to this report (Attachment 1).

The Atlanta meeting represents one of several initial efforts to solicit stakeholder's comments, observations, and recommendations regarding the consolidated planning process. Background information on the Department's initiative to improve the consolidated planning and reporting process is outlined in the attached copy of Assistant Secretary Roy A. Bernardi's letter to the major public interest groups concerned with this issue (Attachment 2).

The Atlanta meeting covered all current regulatory and other requirements of the consolidated planning process, and as such used the attached discussion points guide to ensure that all aspects of the process were addressed as part of the discussion (Attachment 3). Three questions were answered as each aspect of the consolidated planning process was discussed. The questions were:

- What are the strengths of the consolidated planning process?
- What are the weaknesses of the consolidated planning process?
- What recommendations for change should be made to improve the consolidated planning process and make it more useful?

The results of the discussion are presented in the attached "Summary of Comments on the Discussion Points," under the heading of "Strengths," "Weaknesses" and "Recommendations." (Attachment 4)

As is indicated in the Summary, numerous comments and observations were made regarding the consolidated planning process. There were, however, several areas of consensus on strengths, weaknesses and recommendations for improvement. The following is a summary, under each question, of the areas in which there was general consensus.

➤ **What are the strengths of the consolidated planning process?**

The focus group identified three aspects of the consolidated planning process as strengths. These were:

1. The citizen participation requirements – All of the local government representatives indicated that the citizen participation process currently required was resulting in effective opportunities for citizens and other interested parties to participate in the planning process. No changes were recommended.
2. The Strategic Plan – The focus group has general support for the Strategic Plan requirements. The process by which needs, priorities, specific objectives, and strategies are tied together was considered a strength of the consolidated planning process. However, as will be noted later, the participants had concerns that the strategic planning in the Consolidated Plan is often carried out in isolation from other local planning efforts.
3. Integrated Disbursement & Information System (IDIS) – The focus group all had strong support for IDIS as a vehicle to draw program funds. Other aspects of IDIS were generally viewed by the participants as weaknesses.

➤ **What are the weaknesses of the consolidated planning process?**

The participants identified several weaknesses of the consolidated planning process. The included:

1. Housing and Homeless Needs – The lack of current census data and information on Federal housing resources was a consensus weakness noted by the participants. The requirement to include homeless needs in the Consolidated Plan was identified as a duplication of the information communities include in the Continuum of Care submitted as part of the SuperNOFA.
2. IDIS – Participants were in general agreement that the use of IDIS to report program output was not very effective since there are serious gaps in activities underway and accomplishments, and limits in IDIS on reporting certain types of activities. They also indicated that IDIS was not a useful tool for CAPER reporting, and did not report outcomes of program activities.
3. Consolidated Annual Performance Evaluation Report (CAPER) – The participants expressed general agreement that better advice and guidance was needed from the Department on the CAPER. Also, current CAPER requirements result in a document that has limited value as information for citizens and interest groups on achievements and outcomes of program activities.

➤ **What recommendations for change should be made to improve the consolidated planning process and make it more useful?**

Forum participants had general agreement on several recommendations to improve the consolidated planning process. These recommendations included:

1. Where a community is participating in a Continuum of Care, the homeless information, including needs, should be incorporated in the Consolidated Plan by reference to the Continuum of Care.
2. The participants suggested that the Department recognize that for most communities, the Consolidated Plan is not the principle community planning document. For example, all communities in the State of Georgia are required to develop and submit to the State for approval, a Comprehensive Plan. Efforts should be made to allow the use of local plans in lieu of a separate planning process for the Consolidated Plan.
3. The IDIS and CAPER currently focus on reporting annual output goals. Thus, the achievement of long term goals and other overall outcomes of program activities are not effectively reported. The participants suggested the development by the Department of a reporting system that could capture both outputs and outcomes. Most participants indicated that such a system should be Windows-based and separate from IDIS.

In conclusion, the forum presented a good opportunity to review the consolidated planning process with grantees. The result was a number of suggestions and recommendations that merit consideration for improvements to the current guidelines and regulations for the Consolidated Plan. Our recommendation would be to build on this initial session with additional forums with grantees and other stakeholders. Such sessions should result in some definitive recommendations for streamlining and improving the process and making it more results-oriented and useful to State and local governments.